

ART

Professionals Dominate in Show With Outsiders at Pace Gallery

By VIVIEN RAYNOR

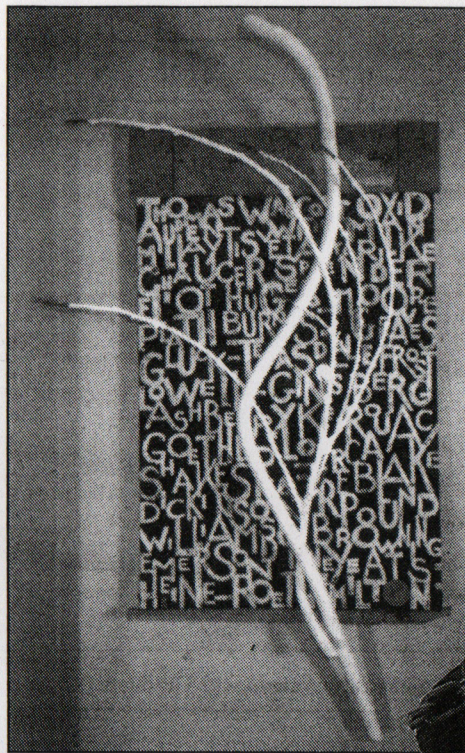
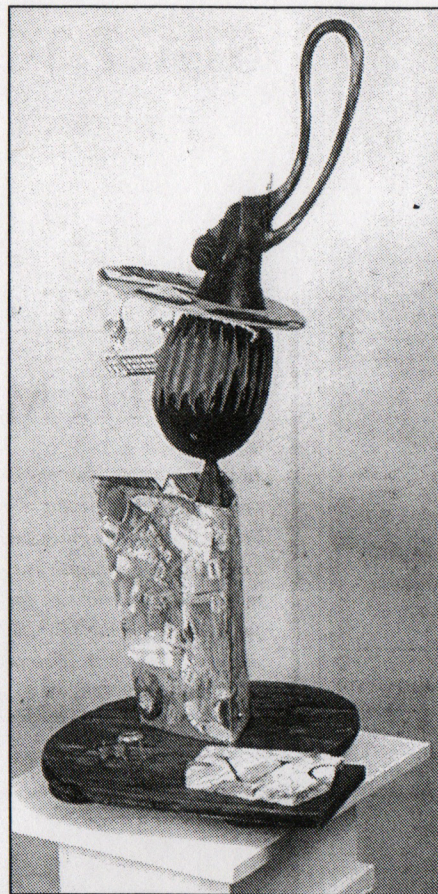
PLEASANTVILLE DADA'S purpose was to humiliate art. Tristan Tzara, one of the movement's founders, said so, and its leading light, Marcel Duchamp, set an example with his notorious Readymades. But the plan went awry, and Dada was quickly absorbed by its victim so that the two are now indistinguishable — as in the genre of assemblage, a hybrid born of the Readymade and Analytic Cubism.

"More Than Meets the Eye," a show of assemblages at Pace University Gallery here, may be too aptly titled for its own good, since the mysteries begin with its curator, D. Dominick Lombardi, whose choices range from the spare and elegant to the fussy and include works as embarrassingly derivative as Dorthella Branch's "dolls."

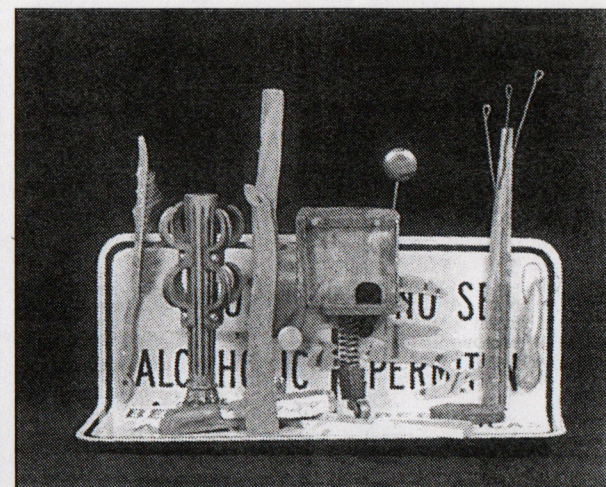
One of several Outsiders in the show, Ms. Branch comes close to plagiarizing the work of Bessie Harvey but misses its point. Ms. Harvey "elicits" figures from tree branches and gives them a nightmarish quality by adding glass eyes and touches of color. Ms. Branch starts from scratch, making stuffed shapes out of black felt, which she then garnishes with eyes, tufts of fur, noses made of wood and other Harvey-like details. In short, she produces toys.

Obligated to feel their way toward art, blind sculptors tend to make clay their medium and the human form their subject. The Outsider Hawkins Bolden, who lost his sight at 5, is an exception. Taking a couple of battered hubcaps and a rectangular metal plate, he attaches them by means of wire and plastic tubing to the bars of an old wood headboard. The composition is ungainly to look at, but thanks to the shapes and textures of its elements, it is a memorable tactile experience.

As a squatter recently evicted from a building on the Lower East Side, Carla Cubitt would seem to qualify as an Outsider, but her works suggest otherwise. One is a tasteless but beautifully made crucifix featuring a Barbie-like personage who has hair like steel wool and a model's body pasted with dollar bills and decked with chains and a miniature padlock. Equally ingenious and a lot more palatable is the freestanding serpentine shape made of soda and beer cans glued end to end and surmounted by the word "Life" in red



Rhoda Keller's "Erato"; D. Dominick Lombardi's "Vessel Assemblage," left, and "Ridin' the Rio Grande," above right; Dorthella Branch's "She Thinks I'm Just an Animal" at right.



glitter. The surfaces of the artist's found objects are as immaculate as her workmanship.

A carpenter by trade, Keith Goodhart shows a large relief composed of what seem to be cutoffs weathered by the elements and shaped by the artist's chisel. They hang, some of them overlapping, in vertical columns, so the effect is of a camouflaged doorway. In a way, this piece connects with Kevin Sampson's collage of bunched-up fabric, paint brushes and twigs applied to a pale blue-green canvas edged with dribbles of brown.

Curtis Cuffie "finds" a painted wood figure of a portly man, a toy

with movable arms, combines it with a snarl of black wool and perches the two atop a brass candlestick.

Nowadays, Outsiders, or self-taught artists, are to professionals what children and dogs are to actors: scene stealers. This show, however, is dominated by professionals, notably the late Tom Kendall with a framed abacus-like arrangement of small wood cubes threaded on horizontal bars. The piece, which comes from the gallery's collection, commands more space than it occupies, putting to shame the convoluted works around it.

Then, there is "Petersburg," by

Eiichi Yoshino, which is neither assemblage nor collage but a Conceptualist double crostic. It consists of color photographs taken in St. Petersburg, laid in rows down and across a large panel.

An artist with didactic leanings, Joe Hendrick pays tribute to both Picasso and Duchamp but awards the lion's share to the Duke of Dada. At the center of a large cream-colored canvas, Mr. Hendrick affixes a cage containing what appear to be marshmallows — a version of Duchamp's "Why Not Sneeze Rose Selavy?" Picasso's first name is scrawled on one of the two boxes

attached to the top of a canvas, as is Duchamp's. The arch-assemblagist, Louise Nevelson, makes a guest appearance with a small and evidently early black relief, drawn from the gallery's collection. Also worth a second look is Rhoda Keller's "Erata," a rectangle of black plastic on which the names of famous writers are inscribed (errata-free) in white and to which is attached a twig painted white and tipped with pen nibs.

The curator's own assemblages have the same anxious quality as the show he has chosen. One is a mélange of found objects — bits of weathered wood, a gilded classical

column embellished with metal hooks and so on — all of them deployed vertically against a bilingual road sign. Titled "Ridin' the Rio Grande," this composition is a comment on the litter afflicting the landscape near the Mexican border. The other one is too complex to describe, beyond saying that it centers on a Baroque table leg surrounded by a fence of folded tin printed with cartoon characters in landscape and includes numerous knickknacks in metal and plastic.

The show continues through next Sunday. The information number is 773-3694.